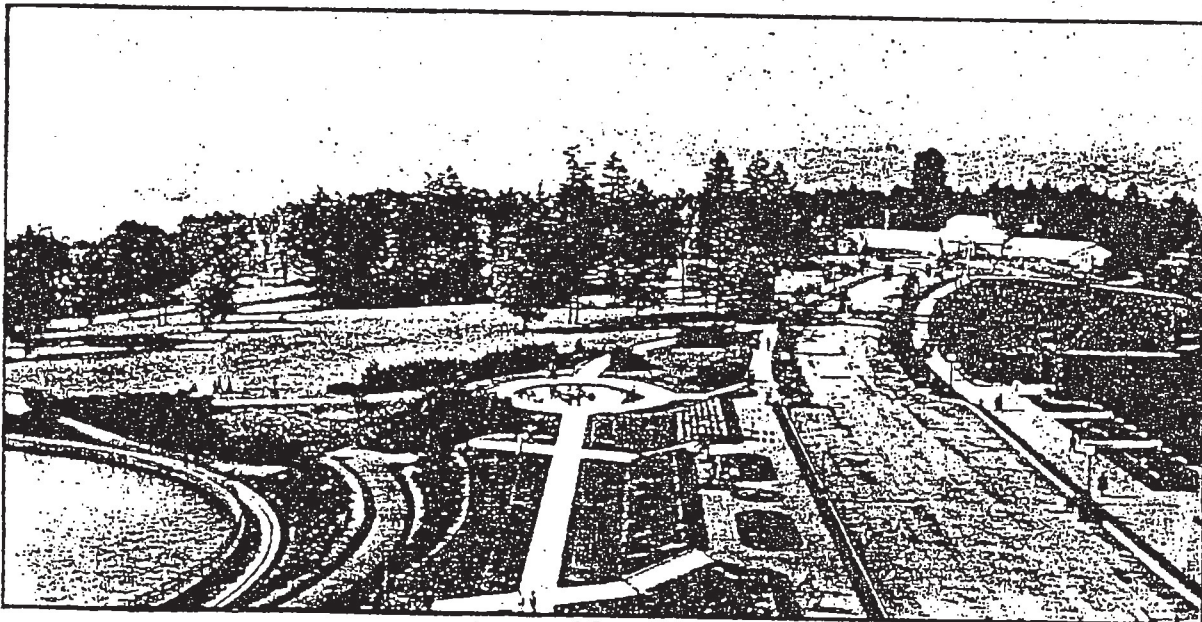


VOLUNTEER PARK

SITE EVALUATION AND DRAFT IMPROVEMENT GUIDELINES



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Courtesy Grace McAdams

CITY OF SEATTLE
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
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EXCERPT

INTRODUCTION

One of 14 parks proposed by the Olmsted Brothers in 1903, Volunteer Park provides the City of Seattle with a highly developed open space of historical, social, and horticultural significance. Respectful of park history and original design intent, this study seeks to objectively examine the existing condition of the park with an eye toward present and future needs. The goal of this examination is the production of a prioritized action plan -- a decision making tool designed for use in the ongoing maintenance and improvement process required for the park.

BACKGROUND

Past

Though land areas immediately surrounding the site at the time of initial park layout were essentially rural, the park facility was, nonetheless, designed as a retreat from the tensions of urban life. The park was to provide for the passive recreational/social activities of that time including carriage-riding, strolling, and public gathering. Music was an important element and was provided for in a band shelter located along the concourse. Though functionally providing for various popular passive recreational activities was of importance in the design, the primary focus was always the creation of a beautiful landscape setting including distant views of the city and sound where ever possible.

As foreground to the views afforded by site location and topography, the Olmsted design provided "islands" of trees and shrubs beyond lush expansive lawns. Trees and shrubs were chosen for their ornamental attributes -- color, texture, form, etc. Many native furs with dense understory were removed to allow the creation of a refined "picturesque landscape."

Formal planting was limited to areas connected with buildings or hardscape elements such as the reservoir and its integral path system. Both evergreen and deciduous flowering materials (such as Rhododendrons, Kalmia, Leucothoe, Berberis, Deutzia, Crataegus, Viburnum, and Rosa) were used extensively throughout these areas.

Initial planting schemes allowed room for full development of trees while overplanting shrubs (30" o.c.) with the intention of selective removal in the future. Establishment and ongoing maintenance of the park in the early years was at the hands of an extensive staff of more than 20 gardeners and laborers.

Present

Often referred to as the "Gem of the Seattle Parks System," Volunteer Park continues to serve Seattle as prime open space for passive recreation, mental stimulation/relaxation, and general diversion from the surroundings and stresses of every day urban life. This role is even more important today than it was at the time of initial park development since surrounding land has become more highly urbanized and new parkland provided to serve similar purposes is very scarce. The inherent physical properties of the

site (size, location, and topographic character) provide the irreplaceable view opportunities for which the park was designed and for which it is and always should be known.

Gem that it is, however, the park has lost much of its luster as time has gone by. Though this loss may not be readily apparent to the casual observer, it is obvious to those who spend significant amounts of time in and around the park and to those familiar with its history. With increasing fervor, DOPAR is being asked by various factions to deal with their concerns regarding the Volunteer Park facility. Primary concerns include safety (for both the site user and park maintenance personnel), preservation, and maintainability.

In order for any park facility to function, it must first and foremost be recognized as a safe place for the user. Volunteer Park today does not represent a safe place for many people. This is mainly due to misuse of heavily planted areas which serve as hiding places for undesirable activities of many sorts. People have reported being startled or frightened when strangers suddenly appear from behind or within shrub beds throughout the park. Lack of a sense of security -- whether real or perceived -- destroys the experience of relaxation and leisurely enjoyment for which this park was and is intended.

Preservation of the historical legacy inherent in any Olmsted facility is recognized by DOPAR as a primary concern. There are very few cities in this country blessed with such a resource and its value today is beyond

assessment. Complete restoration according to the Olmsted plans, however, would be neither possible nor practical due to the following:

- 1) Subsequent siting of major park elements such as the Seattle Art Museum, The Black Sun and the Bandstand
- 2) Siting of park features in response to user demand such as tennis courts and children's play equipment
- 3) Ongoing embellishment of planting beds which has contributed an array of specimen plant material worthy of preservation
- 4) Changes in the modern day use of the park that have affected the design from the standpoint of safety
- 5) Changes in maintenance resources

In order to preserve the park in a manner respectful of the original design while providing a safe environment for the site user, DOPAR must ensure that the facility receives adequate maintenance. Reduction in Volunteer Park maintenance staff today from more than 20 gardeners and laborers to three who handle not only this park but two additional facilities, is a major change that could not have been foreseen by the original designers. Though automated equipment has allowed an increase in worker efficiency over the years, this can in no way provide an equal tradeoff for the loss in manpower. Turf areas have benefitted from the acquisition of time-saving equipment but there are no machines designed to similarly simplify shrub bed maintenance. Increase in

shrub bed area over the years has steadily increased maintenance demands even beyond levels required by the original design. Many hardscape elements including paths, paved areas, lily ponds, stairs, roads, utilities, etc. are in various stages of decline due to age and these likewise impact maintenance demands. Each year trees are larger or greater in number and contribute more to the workload for leaf removal, pruning and other similar tasks.

GOAL

In the effort to respond to the varying concerns presented, DOPAR must set a definitive goal regarding the Volunteer Park facility as a whole:

To provide the people of Seattle and its environs with a safe retreat from the urban environment maintained to maximize site amenities while respecting the original design intent.

Toward that goal, the following objectives are to be met in order of priority*

- 1) Provide a safe environment for site users and park personnel
- 2) Provide beauty in keeping with the original design
- 3) Provide a maintainable facility

*priorities are based on the following rationale

1. Safety is paramount.
2. Facility value justifies reasonable increases in maintenance demands before sacrifice of site amenities or site integrity.

SITE BREAKDOWN

To simplify the evaluation of the entire park, the site is divided into zones. These zones define the importance of each area as it relates (either physically or visually) to people.

Zone 1 encompasses those areas with which the greatest number of people have the closest physical or most significant visual contact. Included are the concourse or "spine" of the park along with its connection to site entries. Areas within this zone are given the highest priority with respect to improvement scheduling -- particularly where safety issues are a concern -- and should ultimately enjoy the highest ongoing maintenance levels.

Note: Though major structures such as the Art Museum and Conservatory fall within this zone, improvements to the structures themselves are not covered in this study.

Zone 2 includes the site periphery (buffer zones) along neighboring properties and neighboring streets of high use. Areas within this zone are of secondary priority.

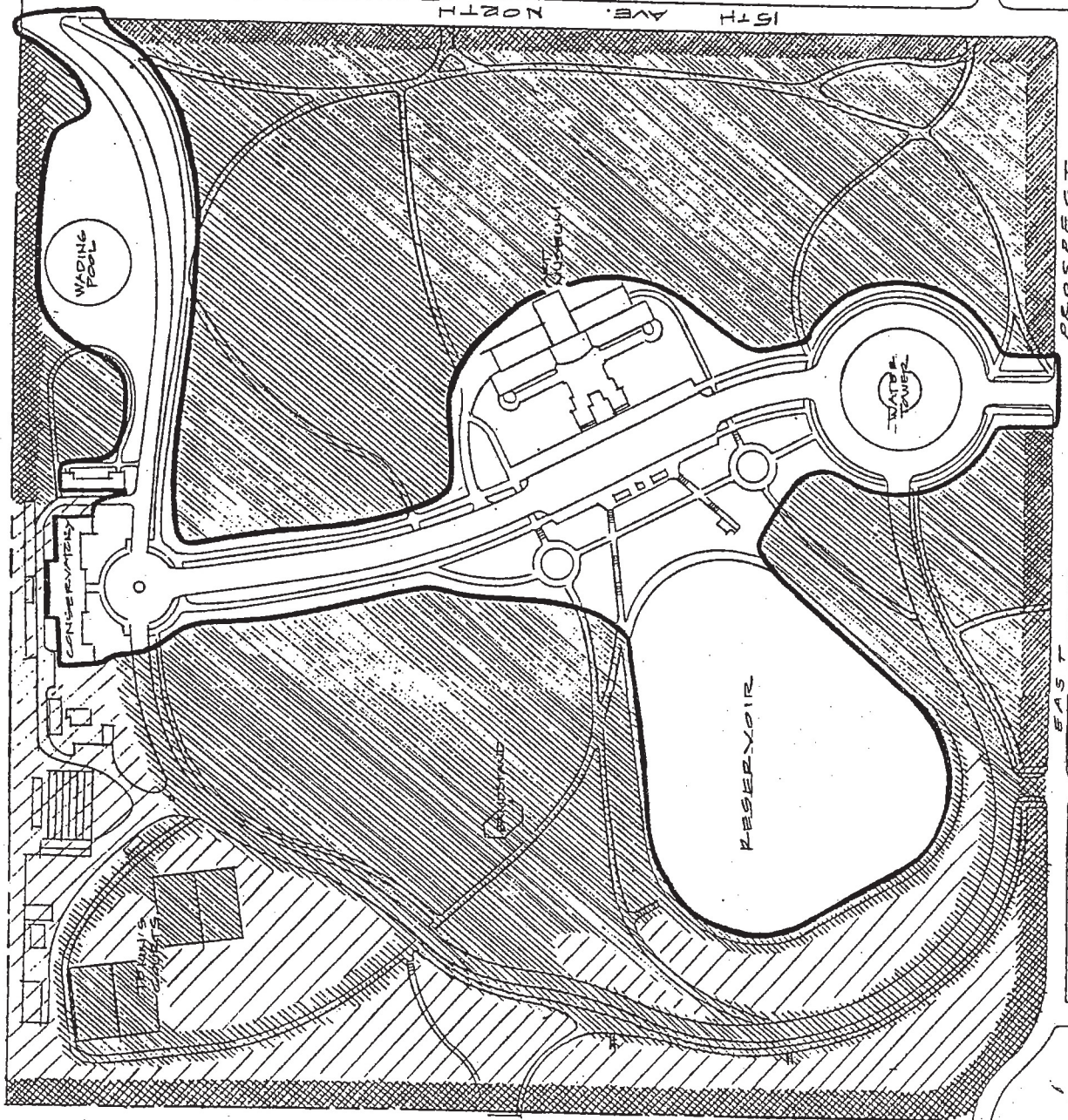
Zone 3 includes portions of the park important due either to proximity to high use areas (paths, play area, restrooms, tennis courts) or to their aesthetic importance in a prominent viewplane. Moderate priority is given to this zone.

Zone 4 includes mostly natural areas remote from public use or distant/obscured within the viewplane. Areas in this category are of significantly reduced priority requiring maintenance only to eliminate immediate hazards or ensure compatibility with surroundings.

The result of project breakdown according to zone and purpose (safety, integrity, maintainability) is an objective numerical priority rating. Highest numerical values indicate projects in Zone 1 required for safety, integrity, and maintenance -- projects that should receive the highest priority in the scheduling of improvements.

A secondary breakdown of projects within each priority level identifies and separates costly capital improvements projects from less costly projects that can be handled by maintenance and operations.

UNIVERSITY



15TH AVE. NORTH

SITE ZONING MAP

EAST PROSPECT

GUIDELINES

As a preliminary step to the Volunteer Park improvement process, it is necessary to have a clearly written and approved set of design guidelines. Drawn up by DOPAR and approved by all affected parties (Friends of Olmsted, Friends of Volunteer Park, etc.) these guidelines should allow department implementation of projects with maximum efficiency. A simple informational review by Grounds Maintenance senior staff and/or Facilities Maintenance (as required) should allow most projects to proceed.

Guideline organization should be based upon the three issues used to prioritize projects: safety, design integrity, and maintenance with a separate section covering the treatment of existing plant materials.

Safety issues would include such things as minimum clear zones along and above paths, lighting levels (based on zone), etc.

Integrity of Design issues should encompass the recommendations given for the facility under the City of Seattle DOPAR Historic Landscape Preservation process.

Volunteer Park falls generally within the "conservation" category which focuses on the maintenance and operation of the existing historical landscape. Protection of the site from the possible infringement of incongruent uses is emphasized. Design changes are generally not encouraged unless these changes reinstate the original design. Strict interpretation of the DOPAR Historic Preservation process is not

recommended, however. Emphasis should be placed on recreating the effects of the original design not the design itself. Design changes which do not reinstate the original design should be allowed if they can be sufficiently justified and are designed for compatibility with the site and its original design.

Maintenance issues would cover recommendations as to bed size based upon the simplification of maintenance tasks. Species of plant materials which have proven to be undesirable or desirable from the standpoint of maintainability will be identified. Recommended spacing of plants along with their recommended size at the time of installation (to limit weed invasion and help guarantee survival) will likewise be given.

This segment of the guidelines would also include recommended path width, paving materials, etc., as they relate to maintenance.

Existing Plant Materials

Many projects, (particularly those in the high-priority/low-cost category) will involve the renovation and adaptation of existing plantings. In order to efficiently handle this work with sensitivity toward the historical and/or intrinsic value of the plant materials involved, strict guidelines must be written and followed. These guidelines must address safety, integrity, and maintenance issues to be sure that all issues are considered and properly weighted.

The following is suggested as a method for tree and shrub evaluation:

I. Is the plant a safety hazard?

If so; remedy by one of the following.

- A. prune
- B. transplant
- C. remove*

*removal to occur where pruning will not remedy the problem and transplanting is not possible or where removal is desirable for other reasons.

II. If the plant does not pose a safety hazard, then numerical valuation is required.

A. Any plant with a positive numerical rating would be highly valued and its treatment could only include:

- 1. selective pruning
- 2. treatment for pests/diseases
- 3. transplanting (only if conditions for survival are very good)

B. Any plant with a numerical rating of zero may be considered for removal (as the least desirable alternative to the aforementioned treatments) subject to review by grounds maintenance senior staff.

C. Any plant with a numerical rating between -5 and -20 may be considered for removal by the static senior gardener and/or the Parks Horticulturist.

existing vegetation evaluation

CHARACTERISTIC	VALUE	
<u>ORIGINAL PLANTING</u>	+5	
<u>RARE SPECIES*</u>	+5	
<u>SIGNIFICANT SIZE</u>	+5	
<u>NOTABLE CHARACTER</u>	+5	
<u>SIGNIFICANT ROLE (IN CONTEXT)</u>	+5	
<u>CEREMONIAL PLANTING</u>	+5	
<u>INAPPROPRIATE</u>	-5	
<u>IN DECLINE</u>	-5	
<u>VOLUNTEER (SELF-SOWN)</u>	-5	
<u>MAINTENANCE PROBLEM</u>	-5	
*AN ACCURATE & COMPLETE PLAN IDENTIFYING RARE SPECIES THROUGHOUT THE PARK IS REQUIRED AS A PORTION OF THESE DESIGN GUIDELINES		FINAL VALUE →